

# Another Possum has her art set on London show

Corrie Perkin

FOR two months, artist Gabriella Possum Nungurayyi contemplated the land of her ancestors. She thought about the terrain and the underground river systems, the water holes and the rich vegetation that thrives in unexpected places.

Then two weeks ago, the eldest daughter of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri was ready to paint.

“All the pictures were in my mind,” she explained yesterday. “I had to come here every day, the painting just happened.”

“Here” was a boat factory in Melbourne’s southeast.

Possum, who moved to Melbourne some years ago, travelled each day to a temporary studio to paint her grandmother’s country, which is near Mount Allen, on the edge of the Northern Territory’s Tanami Desert. Last Thursday, one week after she started, the work was finished.

Possum’s commission was no ordinary one. Gardening personality Jamie Durie and nurseryman Wes Fleming decided last year to

enter London’s 2008 Chelsea Flower Show with a design that celebrated the native Australian landscape. Durie invited Possum to paint an artwork for the garden’s 20m wall.

She was “so excited”, she said yesterday. “I’m working on a big wall and it’s a different way of doing a painting.”

Creating large artworks is not uncommon in the Possum family. Clifford, who died in 2002, was a master of the large canvas: one of his best-known paintings, *Warlugulong* (1977), was bought by the National Gallery of Australia for \$2.4 million last year.

*Warlugulong* has since been viewed by thousands of visitors. Come May in London, his daughter’s work will also be seen by large crowds: about 160,000 visit the five-day Chelsea Flower Show, and it is covered extensively by the BBC.

“Phew, what can I say?” said Possum, a mother of five. “My dad would go around the world with his paintings — here I am,

making something that people will look at when they go to the big flower show.”

While painting her story, “all I could think about was my dad”.

The garden wall has been made into sections for easy transportation. A series of polystyrene blocks, it was rendered and painted ochre before Possum added her story.

Like her artist sister Michelle, the young Gabriella was taught painting by her father. From about the age of 12, “I used to watch my dad doing the painting”, she said.

“I used to watch all them colours when he would mix them. He would say, ‘Pass me the dotting stick’, and so I would pass it to him. I never did any damage, I just watched.”

NGA director Ron Radford said: “We congratulate the daughter of one of Australia’s finest painters. Gabriella Possum carries on Clifford’s legacy by taking the oldest continuous art tradition to young Britain.”



‘All I could think about was my dad’: Gabriella Possum with the mural she has painted to go with an Australian garden at the Chelsea Flower Show

Picture: David Geraghty